

**Anna Mazurowska**

*Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu*

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7932-1138>

**Agnieszka Nymś-Górna**

*Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu*

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5538-1953>

**Jakub Adamczewski**

*Collegium Humanum, Instytut Pedagogiki w Poznaniu*

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0152-3159>

## Parenting in sickness and in health. The qualitative study of daily habits during the COVID-19 pandemic in Polish families<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** The paper presents qualitative research within the interpretative paradigm conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2021 in Poland focused on examining the daily functioning of families during the first wave of the pandemic. Interviews were conducted with parents of children aged 10 ( $n = 10$ ) and adolescents in the final grade of primary school ( $n = 10$ ). The study explored health behaviors, parental mental health, and relationships while uncovering the transformative power of the crisis on family dynamics. Overall, the study sheds light on family experiences during the pandemic, highlighting the need to study the impact of crises on various aspects of family life. Moreover, the pandemic presented parents with opportunities to forge stronger bonds with their children, significantly impacting parent-child relationships. These findings underscore the need to understand how external circumstances influence family life and advocate for interventions and support initiatives during challenging times, benefiting practitioners, policymakers, media, and society at large.

**KEYWORDS:** parenting, mental health, COVID-19 pandemic, health habits, relationships

<sup>1</sup> Funding details: This work was supported by the Adam Mickiewicz University under Grant „Research on COVID-19” [no. 30/2020]

---

Kontakt:	Anna Mazurowska anna.mazurowska@amu.edu.pl Agnieszka Nymś-Górna agnieszka.nyms@amu.edu.pl Jakub Adamczewski jakub.adamczewski@humanum.pl
Jak cytować:	Mazurowska, A., Nymś-Górna, A., Adamczewski, J. (2023). Parenting in sickness and in health. The qualitative study of daily habits during the COVID-19 pandemic in Polish families. <i>Forum Oświatowe</i> , 36(2), 109–128. <a href="https://doi.org/10.34862/fo.2023.2.6">https://doi.org/10.34862/fo.2023.2.6</a>
How to cite:	Mazurowska, A., Nymś-Górna, A., Adamczewski, J. (2023). Parenting in sickness and in health. The qualitative study of daily habits during the COVID-19 pandemic in Polish families. <i>Forum Oświatowe</i> , 36(2), 109–128. <a href="https://doi.org/10.34862/fo.2023.2.6">https://doi.org/10.34862/fo.2023.2.6</a>

---

## INTRODUCTION

Amid the global chaos of the COVID-19 pandemic, this study aims to present the deep changes that occurred in participants' family lives, focusing on shifts in daily habits and the core of parenting. The goal is to capture the individual experiences of parents, covering aspects of mental health such as stress and emotions, dietary and hygiene habits, and the dynamics of relationships between children and their parents and peers. The paper begins by setting out the theoretical framework grounded in the psychology of health, followed by a methodology part, before diving into an analysis of the qualitative research, primarily from the parental perspective.

The term "health behaviours" is occasionally used interchangeably with other terms, such as "medical actions," "health-enhancing (positive) behaviours," "healthy lifestyle," "health-impairing (negative) behaviours," "health-promoting/life-threatening behaviours," "health practices," and "preventive behaviours" Ziarko, 2006, p. 13; Zadworna-Cieślak, 2010, p. 11. In the subject literature, health behaviours are defined with regard to three aspects: purpose, outcome and purpose/function. The purpose-oriented approach refers to the awareness of the subjects and the objectives they formulate. In the outcome-based approach, health behaviours are distinguished from other behaviours on the basis of their effect and function in relation to health. The approach based on purpose and function refers to subjective aspects based on self-awareness as well as objective aspects, i.e., the functional approach to the relationship between behaviour and health (Ogińska-Bulik, 2017; Ziarko, 2006). Defining health behaviours within the purpose-oriented approach, Heszen-Klemens (2010) refers to cognitive determinants of behaviour towards one's own disease: "health behaviours have the status of actions, i.e., activities aimed at health goals." These goals can be positive for one's health, leading to health-enhancing behaviours aimed at avoiding disease, protecting and improving one's health, or negative, health-impairing behaviours that are harmful to health or related to avoiding health practices (Heszen & Sęk, 2010, p. 691). The outcome-based definitions focus on the beneficial

or damaging effects of health behaviours. Within this approach, an activity can be considered a health behaviour if there is evidence of its positive or negative impact on health. This broad definition of health behaviours includes both health-enhancing and health-impairing behaviours, behaviours in illness, and health.

In an attempt to combine the two previous approaches, the third type of definition draws attention to the relationship between the types of knowledge about health and the concept of behaviour (action, activity) with respect to an individual. In this approach, health behaviours are defined in general terms as “reactive, habitual and intentional forms of human activity which, based on objective knowledge about health and subjective beliefs, are in a significant, mutual, positive or negative relationship with health” (Heszen & Sęk, 2010, pp. 690-691). In health psychology, those behaviours are divided into habits, stable patterns of health-enhancing and health-impairing behaviours, and intentional health activities. Health habits and health-enhancing behaviours are developed in the process of socialisation and under cultural influences. They include simple hygiene practices (brushing one’s teeth, washing hands before eating, bathing, washing fruit, eating regular meals), hygiene habits at home (such as cleaning the room), and environment-related habits (rest, sleep, work-life balance). The habits pertaining to the body’s hygiene and the environment are among the oldest health-related behaviours that protect humans against diseases or health changes. These behaviours are shaped from an early age as part of primary socialisation and reinforced as part of secondary socialisation in kindergarten and school. Modelling in the family system or school environment needs to be reinforced at further stages of the child’s development, as health-related activities are continued in adolescence and adulthood (Heszen & Sęk, 2010, pp. 692-693). Purposeful (intentional) health activities are shaped in the course of development when new social roles define new tasks (e.g., conscious preparation for conception and parenthood) (Heszen-Celińska & Sęk, 2020, pp. 86-87).

It is believed that decisions to change behaviours from health-impairing to health-enhancing result from a disease or a threat, which can be associated with an increased frequency of hygienic and health-enhancing behaviours in children. It can be supposed that a sudden change in daily routine, placing more responsibility for the daily schedule and routine on children and their families, created a need to reorganise the day also in terms of everyday activities. We may assume that parents provided their children with appropriate social support in maintaining positive health behaviours in terms of body and mental hygiene. They undertook actions aimed at overcoming difficulties and supporting the effective implementation of health-enhancing activities (Sęk, 1998, pp. 493-494). It is emphasised that social support, particularly parental support, plays an important role in shaping and maintaining positive health behaviours. The family can perform a range of behaviour-modelling activities, supporting or even controlling children in fulfilling their tasks and duties (Łuszczynska, 2004, pp. 163-164).

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The study uses a qualitative method, which was chosen based on the nature of the research topic. The greatest advantage of a qualitative approach lies in the ability to investigate events in their natural environment. Assuming the subjectivity of learning about the world, the qualitative approach helps to study phenomena in a broad context, gather extensive data through direct and personal contact with the respondents, and better understand the researched area of antisocial phenomena by recreating the subjective social reality, exploring the 'external world' from the 'internal' perspective (Pilch & Bauman, 2010, pp. 277-279; Flick, 2012, pp. 12-13). Sharan B. Merriam (1998) formulated five common features of the qualitative approach. First, reality is constructed by individuals in the process of interacting with their social world. The researcher is interested in understanding the perspective of research participants. Secondly, the researcher is treated as the main instrument for collecting and analysing data. Third, research is often field-based, when the researcher contacts people directly to observe their behaviour in natural surroundings. Fourth, the results of this procedure are thematic descriptions, analytical categories, typologies, etc. Finally, the research products are descriptions with rich examples and quotations (Merriam, 1998, pp. 6-8).

Based on those five aspects, we designed the study that aimed at capturing individual parents' experiences related to general mental health (stress and emotions), eating and hygiene habits, and relationships with children and their peers, all during the COVID-19 pandemic period. The general research question was formulated as follows: How do parents of primary school students perceive the pandemic (remote learning period) with regard to changing or maintaining their health habits and behaviours? The second detailed question broadens the topic: How do interviewed parents perceive their influence in maintaining or shaping health-enhancing behaviours during the pandemic? For this study, the semi-structured interview method was used to build the interaction between the researcher and the participant. This particular method has a predetermined objective and problems but assumes a more active role of the researcher than a structured interview (Stemplewska-Żakowicz, 2010, pp. 39-42). With this in mind, the authors tried to capture and describe the individual experiences of the respondents regarding their everyday family life during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The interviews were conducted in January and February (online and face-to-face contact), and the sample consisted of 10 parents (only mothers) and their children (n = 20 people in total). Five students were in early school education (age 10), and five adolescent students (age 13) were in the final grade of primary school. The sampling was guided by the educational stage of the children. The study investigated the organisation of school and family time, focusing only on the first lockdown period, which began in March 2020 and lasted until June 2020. Parents and children were asked to describe this period retrospectively, with emphasis on lockdown routine, emotions, and stressful home situations. The research was preceded by desk research on

pro-health and risky behaviours (including in the aspect of mental health), parental and peer relationships, and the specificity of children's development. This allowed us to deepen the topics related to desk research, and conversations with people directly affected by the changes caused by COVID-19 have become our main interest. Thanks to this, we learned more about the opportunities, limitations, and ambivalences associated with this period. The authors focus solely on the parenting perspective, and while the acquired research material is so extensive, we decided to separate the perspective of parents and children in order to analyse the collected material closer. Of course, the context of children appears as an additional aspect, but it is not the main focus.

In this paper, we decided to use the interpretive approach to qualitative analysis, also known as Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, which is a methodology that focuses on deriving and processing qualitative data to detail personal lived experiences. This approach is particularly rich in analysing data at both the descriptive (surface) and interpretive (deeper) levels, weaving in historical context and theory. It has been thoroughly delineated by researchers such as Braun and Clarke (2006), who have developed a specific approach to reflexive thematic analysis. This approach aims to dispel confusion regarding the position of reflexive thematic analysis among the numerous existing typologies of thematic analysis. The interpretive approach provides a deeper understanding of the data, interpreting the underlying meanings or patterns in the collected data. It should be noted that the presented data, which are fragments of a larger study, relate only to the experiences of the respondents, and the descriptions and conclusions apply only to the ten selected parents. The sample cannot be treated as representative of Polish society. The results are based on the analysis of the gathered interview data in three selected aspects: mental health (stress and emotions), eating and hygiene habits, and relationships with parents and peers, which are presented in the next section.

#### MENTAL HEALTH OF PARENTS (EMOTIONS AND STRESS)

The first phase of the COVID-19 outbreak in Poland had a significant impact on the mental well-being of parents with kids in primary school. They were dealing with a situation they had never faced before. The measures imposed by the Polish government and the nationwide lockdown announced in March 2020 brought about new stressors and emotional challenges. The predominant feeling among most parents was frustration, arising from having to take charge of their children's remote learning and a perceived lack of support from their partners. According to the interviewed parents, they described this experience as follows:

*"I was so frustrated that I even wrote letters to the prime minister. What they did was force us to combine all our duties, when the prime minister came out in May and said that we had to go back to the university and work, and nobody thought about the fact that an eight-year-old was home alone. This caused fru-*

*stration: the whole situation, this combination of absurdities, that we must be prepared for it and, as responsible people, that everything must work, that you must have the Internet and a computer available, that everything has to be on time. The need to send materials, take photos every day, the lessons, your own stuff, work, and not being able to leave the child alone at home. It was frustrating, very frustrating. (...) You were pissed off with all this. Not like sadness, but anti-government frustration.” (Parent 5, female, younger child)*

*“Frustration, I also felt frustration when I got emails from the teacher with a to-do list, and that was it.” (Parent 2, female, younger child)*

The parents also pointed out that distance learning caused chaos at home:

*“There was a lot of chaos; it was very difficult to organise the day because there was no current schedule.” (Parent 2, female, younger child)*

*“It was really a chaotic time for us, and everything really depended on how we organised child care.” (Parent 3, female, younger child)*

On the other hand, some parents noticed that distance learning at home was less stressful for their children than going to school and that once a daily schedule or a new structure was introduced, they could organise their day more effectively.

*“There is one really big positive factor. I think this home-schooling was a bit less stressful than going to school. As of today, it seems to me that distance learning is less stressful for children. This is a really big positive factor.” (Parent 7, female, older child)*

*“For sure, something very helpful that we came up with a little later, and I think someone suggested it to us, is a daily agenda, meaning that you start studying at 9 am at the latest, you do 40 minutes of work, and then you have a 20-minute break. This kind of routine is necessary, especially when you can’t go out so that the child has everything arranged.” (Parent 5, female, younger child)*

*“There were moments when she was happy to be home, not having to go to school. She was glad that she could spend more time with her parents and sister.” (Parent 4, female, younger child)*

*“Every time my daughter saw another list of twelve, thirteen, fifteen points, it caused ... I mean, maybe not at the very beginning, but the longer it took, the more frustration it caused, and there was no motivation to do anything. So that was also very difficult and, sort of, finally, my daughter and I decided that we would draw up a kind of schedule because both my daughter and I like schedules and we like to act according to a scheme, which means that we know what will happen next or what we can plan, we can, in fact, plan even our free time”. (Parent 2, female, younger child)*

*“Each family has to adjust it to themselves, right? I mean, I think that a schedule helps; setting the daily routine helps because you can plan this time, even free*

*time. I'd rather say that sometimes you just have to let it go, just like in normal life, whether they're going to school or not, sometimes they'll do it right away, the homework, sometimes they'll do it a little later, it's kind of doesn't really matter. And it's important to cover this material and understand it. It is definitely worth planning this time together with your child, too." (Parent 2, female, younger child)*

At the same time, the parents were aware that their emotions were strongly affected by their children's well-being and school performance. The respondents often emphasised that monitoring the child's education in the home environment (controlling punctuality, attendance, regularity, and quality of tasks sent) was a new element that they dealt with in various ways:

*"It wasn't easy. It was nervous because my boy did not cope well at first; he could not get this kind of learning because he was used to everything being done in class, the teachers talking about things, while now you had to read some things on your own. It wasn't easy. (...) It was hard. I was afraid of what it would be like in the eighth grade." (Parent 6, female, older child)*

*"So, I did everything as if, yes, learning is learning, yes, it takes a lot of effort, but I know that it will pay off, this effort of mine and that ... so that she wouldn't be behind with anything, because I was simply afraid that when he finishes the third grade... (Parent 4, female, younger child)*

*"I think there was a lot of tension. That education itself caused a lot of tension. The fact that we had to take more responsibility for education caused a lot of tension, and we had to do our own work as well at the same time." (Parent 10, female, younger child)*

The interviewed parents noticed many factors causing stressful situations at the personal and family level. Many felt they had to dedicate themselves to their families, neglecting their professional commitments or other duties. Some sought the help of others by employing babysitters, while others shared household chores with their partner. Among the interesting aspects of the study, it is worth focusing on the following:

*"I neglected my job, that's for sure. It wasn't as effective as it used to be when I operated normally. I had to thoroughly prepare classes with the students. Other things were put aside at the expense of my own professional matters." (Parent 5, female, younger child)*

*"And sometimes it seems to me that you may have even less time for the family, even though you are at home; it seems to me that sometimes you spend less time than you would if you went to work and came back." (Parent 1, male, older child)*

The last element that drew our attention was the well-being of parents during the first pandemic period. Many of them reported a sense of weakness, powerlessness, and fatigue related to the situation at home. This can be seen in the following statement:

*“It was also tiring for me at times. To be honest, I had moments when I wanted to close the door, slam it, and leave, just to let my head rest and stop thinking about learning, about school. And having to explain all the time, because it meant talking all the time, talking to the child, apart from the lessons you also had to entertain them, to manage their time somehow, so that they wouldn’t get bored so that they wouldn’t think about what was going on around them. Sometimes, I even turned off the news so that they wouldn’t hear about this Covid because they were fed up with it ... (...) and I just needed to take a break from time to time, so I would get in the car and go to Przeźmierowo to my parents, to at least change my surroundings for a moment and also take a break from hearing the word mum all day long, which, you know, sometimes sounds wonderful ... I mean, mostly it sounds wonderful and beautiful, but sometimes it was kind of very frustrating when I heard mum this, mum that, over and over again. (Parent 4, female, younger child)*

*”I didn’t go to work, and I stayed with the children, and I must admit that I probably had one or two moments when I felt just powerless. I was frustrated with such powerlessness, such, you know, a Groundhog Day. Well, the first one was like that, you know, the first one... now you have a different attitude, you’re wiser, now I go to work, somehow, I have organised all of it better (...), but I won’t pretend that I didn’t have some, well, maybe one or two moments, but I called my friend, I opened my heart and somehow it went away, but I had two difficult moments. (...) I wouldn’t have shut myself off so much with my children and would have gone, somehow I would have combined work and home, for my psyche and, for example, I would have hired, now I have a babysitter who comes several times a week, or I can ask their grandma so that I too can go to work, or I can ask someone to cook for me, grandma or the babysitter, so that I don’t burden myself so much, I don’t want to be so perfectly perfect, because it wasn’t good either, just shut yourself off like that, for me, for my psyche.” (Parent 9, female, older child)*

*“There was some stress related to my professional life, what is going to happen, whether they will open us or not, because my industry is related to foreign clients mostly and then they could not come to us, we had reduced salaries at the time, so that also caused some stress. On the other hand, the further we went, we sort of got used to certain situations, understood that it will end someday and we will get by; this made me and my husband calmer because since I did not go to work or later, at some point, he stopped going to work too, he only did some things at home, well, all the extra things we used to spend money on were closed,*

*so it turned out that even with reduced salaries we can get by and it's not a big deal for us, so this calmness came later, naturally.” (Parent 2, female, younger child)*

In hindsight, parents found some positive aspects in the situation, like having more time to spend with family, which was missing before the pandemic. When schools shifted to remote learning, and everyone had to rearrange their daily routines, it really affected how parents felt. The impact varied depending on the child's grade and whether they had to juggle work and parenting. The data showed a range of feelings and challenges parents faced during isolation, highlighting how tough it was to balance family stuff, work, and dealing with making sure their kids learned from home.

The main feeling for most parents was frustration. They were suddenly in charge of their kids' remote learning and felt like there wasn't much support. Parents were frustrated about government decisions, having to handle many different responsibilities, and feeling like people didn't get how hard things were for them. Remote learning messed up home life and made it tough to figure out the daily routine without a proper plan. However, some parents found that if they set up a daily schedule to copy a regular school day, remote learning became less stressful for their kids compared to traditional school. Parents wanted to spend more time with their families, even if it meant putting work on the back burner. They also talked about feeling stuck and tired because handling everything at home was tough. They tried different ways to cope, like working out deals with their jobs, getting help from outside, sharing chores with their partners, or having a daily plan.

As time went on, parents noticed they were getting better at dealing with the new normal. Kids had a hard time with remote learning, and parents worried about their grades. Parents felt stressed because they had to take care of their kids' education and were afraid their kids might fall behind. But there were a couple of good things in the mix. Some parents liked spending more time with their families during isolation. And even though it was tough, the situation brought in some new sources of joy, showing how important family time is. Unfortunately, some parents had a tough time keeping up with work and felt the pinch financially because of changes like pay cuts. Even though parents said they felt stressed and frustrated, some of them also understood that the situation wouldn't last forever and that they could adapt to it.

#### PARENT-CHILD AND CHILD-PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Parents' reflections on their relationships with their children during the period of distance learning in the initial phase of the pandemic were remarkably varied. Certain parents underscored the importance of dividing the time spent together into blocks dedicated to their children's education and leisure.

*“Yes, definitely, definitely we had to devote more time, get into the rhythm too, and we had to take on a bit of a teacher’s role.” (Parent 2, female, younger child)*

Spending time with children at home was also associated with combining the role of a parent and educator, which some parents found particularly challenging. At the same time, parents noticed that through this mode of education, their perception of time spent with children changed, as they no longer associated it only with the time after school. Consequently, some parents felt overwhelmed with their responsibilities. One idea to overcome this difficulty was to share work at home between spouses or partners.

*“Mum, I want to drink, mum, this and that, so to be honest, I didn’t want to hear that word anymore, and I would sometimes say, “Say, dad, give me this, not mum.” Just replace the word “mum” with “dad.” So, they knew that sometimes I had enough, so they changed it, but our relationships were always good, so I can’t really complain. Well, we complement each other, we take shifts. Well, sometimes I asked my husband, please, take care of them now because I want to rest a bit, and I locked myself in the bedroom, read a book, and needed at least half an hour of peace, just peace and quiet.” (Parent 4, female, younger child)*

Sharing household chores gave the opportunity to break away from current events, if only for a short while, and reorganise the daily home life. Other parents noted the difficulty of combining family and professional duties and saw the importance of this time in view of having many commitments in everyday life.

*“It was nice because my husband didn’t leave, and we had a lot of time for ourselves and for the child. Somehow, maybe if it had lasted longer, we would have gotten tired of each other, but since it was March, April, May, the children went back at the end of May, there was no tragedy. If it wasn’t for the tension caused by the fact that you had to combine work with child care, I think ... I didn’t complain. We had so much time for ourselves after all – there was time for everything. For cooking, games, relationships. Pretty cool.” (Parent 5, female, younger child)*

*“To be honest, in this respect, it was a blessed time for us and still is because, before that, we had a huge deficit of each other. And it may also be related to the fact that he did not look for this contact so much outside, because also there is this aspect of my work, which ... until then I had worked a lot. A lot, and because I have many jobs and my own business, and work at school, and many different things, and I am constantly developing and dealing with loads of matters, there was little time on my part, and I never operated in any systematic way like I would finish at 3 p.m. and go home, no such routines. We never had them, although we always tried to have some points of reference. And suddenly, everything stopped. And also, there is the second aspect, namely the fact that a lot was*

*going on in Wiktor's private life at that time, a lot, and he had a huge need for closeness, love, so what happened was a blessing for us. Well, I don't know, but maybe all this saved him from more serious consequences of his personal situation. For us, it has been a really beautiful time, it has changed a lot, and we all learnt a lesson from it and I don't think we will ever go back to working at such high speed." (Parent 3, female, younger child)*

One of the mothers emphasised that the family situation was complicated at that time, and the additional time spent together helped to cope with many different emotions. There were also other voices claiming that it was a good time for family relations:

*"We had more time to play with them, to talk, to have fun, to hang out together, to just watch something, for these games, for... There was definitely more of it, yeah. That's how we got closer, it seems to me; we got to know each other better, our needs, our habits, that's for sure." (Parent 4, female, younger child)*

*"Our daughter was going through a rebellious period, and in our case, it had a good influence on our relations because we became a little closer. It did better than harm to us." (Parent 8, female, older child)*

Some parents mentioned that it was also a moment of discovering each other, important for their relationship:

*"The advantage was that we are this kind of family, well, where lots of things are happening, there are three children, now they have a dog, a cat, well, it was a pleasure to be with the family, well, I don't know, with animals and being in nature, that's all we really had, we had ourselves." (Parent 9, female, older child)*

The way children interacted with their friends looked a bit different during that time, and it also changed. It wasn't just about school friends but also friends outside of school. Some parents mentioned that the most important thing for kids returning to school after distance learning was reconnecting with their friends.

*"When it comes to returning to school, well, I can't say they were glad to go back there. They mostly looked forward to seeing their friends." (Parent 1, male, older child)*

Parents repeatedly pointed out the fact that children missed their peers:

*"She only complained about the lack of contact with her friends, that she couldn't see them, that she couldn't see her class teacher, because she also missed the teachers, the school, the bustle." (Parent 4, female, younger child)*

However, it's worth noting that children also started using new communication methods, which served as substitutes for face-to-face interactions:

*“This generation is already, so to speak, so immersed in electronics that sometimes they even, from what I saw with my son, some of them didn't even leave those lessons, so to speak, but continued their conversations online. Well, but there was no actual contact with peers. Face to face, so to speak. There was only this online contact. (Parent 1, male, older child)*

*“Well, unfortunately, they were very limited, just chatting, seeing each other on Skype cameras during lessons or outside, and phone calls, but apart from that, unfortunately, she had no contact. No chance to see each other.” (Parent 4, female, younger child)*

*“[My daughter interacted with her peers] Through social media. Often it was an online group chat.” (Parent 8, female, older child)*

*“They even connected with their class, but they played. They didn't talk, just play. (Parent 6, female, older child)*

Parents noted that children and adolescents used different types of online and telephone communication. Sometimes, they were satisfied simply with the awareness of being in each other's presence without a need to start a conversation. This happened, for example, during online multiplayer gaming, although such games often provide a possibility to talk or chat with each other.

An important factor in maintaining relationships was the child's age, maturity, and range of interpersonal skills.

*“The truth is that ... and I noticed that this does not only apply to [the son], but also from the teacher's perspective, I have also seen such situations and heart voices that, just like with [the son], he was very eager to build relationships, they were even too eager to build them during lessons, they would chat and use other such... such ways. But back in the days when these online things weren't there yet, he texted sometimes; he sometimes texted with, I don't know, with two or three of his classmates. However, they are still so young; for example, [the son] has not yet developed this competence to build such a relationship when they do not see each other. He can't do that because they don't really know what to talk about with each other; they can't create such relationships, so those relationships weren't really there, at least in his case, not entirely”. (Parent 3, female, younger child)*

One of the mothers drew attention to the fact that her daughter selected her peers:

*“The first month or so, maybe, because we had a very intense time with the horse at that time, so that also kind of occupied her a lot. And I noticed a change after*

*about two months; my daughter didn't want to meet anyone; I mean, she didn't want to connect with anyone on Teams; she didn't want to talk, and I didn't actually know why. Then she said something like it was mostly because her classmates didn't really have their passions, but she had her passion and said that she just didn't want to talk about the game. When she saw someone, she didn't want to talk about the game; she'd rather talk about something else, but these people didn't want to talk about it, so she said something like she didn't feel the need to meet them. We have these close friends, and they have a boy who goes to class with Lilka, so ... and we met with them quite often, at least once a month, so I think we made sure she had this social element.” (Parent 2, female, younger child)*

Parents also discussed emotions related to peer relationship:

*“I think he enjoyed it when he could go out with his friends. It was definitely something that motivated him to do his homework, so we agreed that okay, when you finish your homework, you can meet your friend, for example. It was something very motivating. However, there was definitely a lot of frustration over being locked up at home. That was difficult for him, and we could see that he was very frustrated, which caused a lot of anger.” (Parent 10, female, younger child)*

The interviewed parent pointed out that the restricted opportunities for meeting a child's social needs led to frustration but also served as a motivation for independent study.

It is crucial to highlight that both relationships with parents and peers played a vital role in daily life during the distance learning period. These connections were significant for the well-being of both the interviewed parents and the children and adolescents. The importance of these relationships manifested in feelings of security (despite pandemic-related anxiety), the effectiveness of undertaken initiatives, and the ability to adapt to the new reality. The primary function of these relationships was supportive, and their potential impact was evident in the interviews.

Parents' observations about their relationships with children during the distance learning period in the initial wave of the pandemic varied. Some stressed the importance of structuring time spent together into segments dedicated to their children's education and free time. The dual role of being a parent and a teacher posed challenges for some, leading to a perceived need for support, often shared through household responsibilities with partners. For example, one parent emphasised the necessity of sharing duties and occasionally sought solace in moments of tranquillity, highlighting the significance of a balanced approach to family and professional life. Another parent expressed gratitude for the extended family time but recognized the challenges of juggling work with childcare responsibilities. The pandemic-induced slowdown allowed for a reassessment of priorities, nurturing closer family bonds.

Despite the complexities, many parents considered the period a blessing, offering an opportunity to spend quality time together. Some reported a positive impact on family relationships, citing increased understanding and closeness. The shared experience provided a unique chance for self-reflection and learning more about each other's needs and habits.

The relationships between children and their peers underwent transformations during this time. While some parents noted the importance of face-to-face interaction, others observed the proficiency of children in using online platforms for communication. The age, maturity, and interpersonal skills of children played crucial roles in how they adapted to the new modes of communication. The significance of relationships with both parents and peers was evident in the interviews. Parents recognized the role of these connections in providing a sense of security and supporting their ability to adapt to the challenges posed by the pandemic. Despite frustrations and limitations, relationships played a pivotal role in maintaining the well-being of both parents and children during the period of distance learning.

#### EATING AND HYGIENE HABITS, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Schoolwork and remote learning led to some relaxation in home rules regarding morning activities. Although children didn't neglect hygiene practices, parents observed changes in morning behaviour patterns due to working from home. For instance, students connected with the teacher while still in their pyjamas or even from bed, postponing breakfast or morning washing to a later time, such as during a break:

*“Most of the children (performed) these morning (activities) (...) out of bed, and these things were moved to sometime later, when they had a longer break, then they washed, had breakfast and then had more lessons... (...) This is something that has stayed to this day, that they... if you don't tell them... If you don't push them a bit, they'll stay all day in their pyjamas (...). (Regarding breakfast) it was kind of normal, but, well, sometimes breakfast was just at some point during those longer breaks. (Parent 1, male, older child)*

*“(My daughter) got up as usual as if she was going to school, got dressed, brushed her teeth, ate something, had a little breakfast. Then we sat down to do the materials that the teacher sent us. (...) Of course, sometimes I let her sleep a little longer when she stayed longer (in the evening) so that she felt relaxed. After all, she was at home, so I didn't want to introduce some kind of regime that she must necessarily get dressed. (...) but the rest of it was a bit distorted. It was only to make her feel good and it was dictated by her well-being so that, well, that she wouldn't feel as if she had to do something. If she just didn't feel like it, she wouldn't dress and walked in her pyjamas.” (Parent 4, female, younger child)*

*“There was no set system of getting up every day. He got up when he wanted to. Unless they were supposed to send a task at a specific time, when there was*

*a deadline, we did everything at the last minute. (...) We try to eat healthily. As I have mentioned – the morning schedule of getting up was severely disrupted. Breakfast time definitely changed. When [the son] goes to school, we eat breakfast together in the morning. [The son] has an appointed time when he must come to the kitchen with his teeth brushed, his face washed, and we eat breakfast. We have 15-20 minutes because the school is not far away and we drive by car. We leave the house at 7:45-7:50. This is always after breakfast. Today, [the son] eats breakfast at any time he wants. Breakfast time is completely different compared to what it would be like if they went to school.” (Parent 7, female, older child)*

*“Maybe they brushed their teeth, but [the son] used to walk in his pyjamas.” (Parent 9, female, older child)*

The daily routines of parents working and children studying at home next to each other differed significantly from their experiences before the COVID-19 pandemic. The initial period of isolation, involving remote work and uncertainty about the future, posed a challenge for parents in fulfilling both their professional and family duties. A statement from one of the mothers underscores that adults also encountered difficulties in maintaining their daily routine during this period:

*“Then the day turned to night. In our case, mine and my daughter’s, my daughter is not an extremely disciplined young person. I have always been a night owl, so at some point, the day turned into night for us. We slept during the day because my job shut down. I still worked in March, but from mid-March and April, I was sitting at home. There were no fixed times for sleeping, activity, meals, study – nothing. Everything was actually turned on its head (...). You would eat meals on your lap in front of the computer.” (Parent 8, female, older child)*

Several parents consciously tried to maintain the structure of everyday life before the pandemic with regard to eating and hygiene habits. This required them to be more involved and control elements of the daily routine, such as mealtimes. Sometimes, the work of the parents, even if done at home, made it impossible to supervise the child’s school time constantly.

It is noteworthy to mention the statement of a parent who initially made a conscious effort to uphold the daily routine. However, as the period of remote learning persisted, the structure gradually weakened, eventually allowing the daughter to spend the day in her pyjamas.

*“I mean, we tried to make it look as much as possible like a mirror image of what we used to do or what our daughter used to do when she was at school. So, I didn’t really want to relax here. To be honest, towards the end, I let go a bit, that is ... they could be in pyjamas if there were no online classes, if there were no classes with a teacher (...) well, you know, then she could be in her pyjamas*

*or bathrobe, and it was a big thing for her that she could be in her pyjamas at breakfast. However, as I say, I mostly tried to follow this regime so that ... well, because then it was easier to control the sort of focus that we were doing specific things, as always, it doesn't change.” (Parent 2, female, younger child)*

Parents particularly highlighted an element of a hygienic lifestyle related to extended sleep time. Although they acknowledged a change in sleep hours, parents were positive that their children received sufficient sleep during the remote learning period. The mornings during the pandemic and remote learning were notably shorter, primarily due to the elimination of commuting time to school.

*“The rhythm is still the same; that is, around 8:30 (the daughter) goes to sleep and gets up around 7 in the morning. Now it has moved, and my daughter sleeps longer, until eight, eight-thirty, if the alarm clock is off (...), but also goes to bed a little later, so it's sort of a natural consequence. (Parent 2, female, younger child)*  
*“More, she got more sleep, slept more, because, well, I let her sleep, but also, let's face it, she went to bed later because she knew that she didn't have to get up at seven in the morning to get to school at eight-fifteen.” (Parent 4, female, younger child)*

The closure of schools and workplaces, along with home isolation, markedly restricted the physical activity of students (and their parents)<sup>2</sup>. Organised sports activities, like swimming or tennis, and sports training, such as football or judo, which were regularly attended by children, were cancelled or temporarily suspended. Parents mentioned a decrease in physical activity in the following statements:

*“Physical activities, unfortunately, were very limited because they ... when [the daughter] still went to school, she went to the swimming pool, she had judo, PE, there was a lot of it. Unfortunately, it all fell apart, so physical activity was down to zero. But sometimes I would do some morning exercises with them [children], they jumped, I turned on some music, that's the way we did it. But there was also PE with the teacher. Once a week, their class teacher connected with them and conducted really cool classes, and they all jumped. Well, in the room, it was done in front of the laptop.” (Parent 4, female, younger child)*

*“I give [my son] a lift to school, but he comes home on his own. He had some exercise then. Now, I have to force him to exercise a bit. [The son] plays tennis. Then, probably because of the fear and because no one knew what kind of plague it was, how it spread. Because of this, his tennis classes were cancelled. In fact, they have been cancelled to this day. It has not affected his appearance or weight in any way, but there is a physical slowdown and there is little exercise. Actually, I feel it myself that there is some permission, or we give it ourselves, to avoid any strenuous effort.” (Parent 7, female, older child)*

2 It is worth pointing out that at the beginning of the pandemic in Poland, all social contacts were forbidden, including a ban on going out into social space, e.g., to forests or parks.

*“In general, the first [lockdown], in my opinion, affected ... so that the body froze.”  
(Parent 9, female, older child)*

During that period, physical education (PE) classes at school were also conducted remotely. Teachers made efforts to encourage students to stay physically active. Amid the challenging time of the first lockdown, characterised by uncertainty, unpredictability, and a lack of knowledge, parents began organising minimal physical activities for children with increased attention. Before COVID-19, students naturally engaged in more daily movement as they spent time away from home, such as at school or participating in extracurricular activities.

*“Standard things, like riding a bike, a scooter, a skateboard, as much as possible. Things like swimming pool, family bike trips in the forest were absolutely out of the question. However, we did what we could ‘illegally,’ like take the bike to a closed large area, that yes. As much as possible.” (Parent 5, female, younger child)*

*“We bought a stationary bike, but [the son] didn’t want to [use it] much. Physical activity was poor. When the PE teacher sometimes gave [a set of exercises], [the son] did them a little bit”. (Parent 6, female, older child)*

*“All in all, we rode bikes so much that we discovered how cool Poznan looks. We discovered a lot of bicycle routes in Poznan, at night and during the day. [...] I can say that we discovered Poznan as if from the bike. (Parent 9, female, older child)*

*“[The son] played alone in the garden with his brothers at that time. He’d got [...] a basketball hoop for Christmas, and he also played basketball in the back garden.” (Parent 10, female, younger child)*

As noticed by one of the mothers, the time when her son, who had regularly trained three times a week, had limited access to sports made him appreciate on-site training.

*“The added value that appeared was that my son also appreciated more, he appreciated the trainings that take place on-site because he can make a comparison; he knows what it was like when these trainings were not there, so maybe now he attaches more importance to them, and they are more important to him, that’s what I think.” (Parent 10, female, younger child)*

The participant’s quote provides a personal perspective on the broader theme of reduced physical activity during the pandemic, showcasing a potential positive impact on individual perspectives and values.

Insights into the impact of remote learning and working from home on the daily routines and behaviours of both parents and children during the COVID-19 pan-

demie were revealed through the interviews. Noteworthy changes encompass alterations in morning rituals, disruptions to established schedules, and shifts in sleep and physical activity patterns. A significant influence was observed in the morning routines of children. Parents recounted instances where students engaged in online classes while still in bed or in their pyjamas, postponing breakfast or morning hygiene rituals until later breaks. This more relaxed approach to morning activities was seen as a consequence of the shift to distance learning. The text incorporates insights from various parents, illustrating a range of responses to this change. Certain parents adapted to their children having a more flexible morning routine, while others struggled to maintain a similarity to the pre-pandemic routine.

The interviews also underscored broader impacts on daily life, including the blurring of distinctions between day and night. The absence of regular schedules and routines during remote learning presented challenges for parents in balancing work and family responsibilities. Working from home contributed to a more flexible daily structure, with some parents acknowledging the difficulty of upholding discipline. This notably affected sleep patterns, as children slept more during the remote learning period due to the elimination of morning commutes. Parents recognized this shift in sleep hours, attributing it to a natural consequence of reduced travel times.

Physical activity experienced a decline during the pandemic; with the closure of schools and extracurricular activities, children had limited opportunities for exercise. Some parents attempted to introduce minimal physical activity at home, while others observed an overall reduction in their children's physical activity levels. The authors provide examples of parents who tried to involve their children in activities such as cycling or using an exercise bike to compensate for the absence of organised sports activities.

Finally, the interviews reflect the challenges parents confront in maintaining a sense of normality in their children's lives during a period of uncertainty. Disruptions to daily routines, alterations in sleep patterns, and limitations in physical activity emerged as visible consequences of remote learning and working from home. Nonetheless, it also highlights families' adaptability to challenges, with some finding inventive ways to incorporate physical activity and preserve a sense of structure.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the provided evidence indicates that despite the challenges posed by the period of distance education and isolation during the initial wave of the pandemic, which required the restructuring of daily life and learning new skills, the majority of interviewed parents emphasised that it brought about significant changes in family relationships. Once emotional balance was restored, parents recognized the opportunity to draw closer and deepen their understanding of each other. While the prospect of being compelled to stay together at home might have initially felt overwhelming, in hindsight, the chance to engage in shared activities, participate in meaningful conversations, and navigate a range of emotions prompted both children and parents

to reevaluate their family life before the pandemic, discovering the additional potential within the family unit. The mandated life in seclusion during lockdown, without physical proximity with loved ones, the inability to travel or visit, and the absence of face-to-face interactions and classroom learning prompted families to value their everyday lives. It is important to note, however, that the parents and children involved in the study did not display challenging behaviours, such as violence. It can be assumed that the family life of those in crisis during the lockdown period might present a different scenario.

The aim of this article was to present the multifaceted impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on parents and children, particularly during the period of remote learning and lockdown. Through interviews, we explored the nuanced changes in daily routines, family relationships, and the psychological well-being of parents. It is essential to note that our analysis primarily centred on the parents' perspective. Our next paper, currently in preparation, will shift focus to comprehensively investigate and analyse the experiences and perspectives of students during these abnormal times.

#### REFERENCES

- Braun, V., Clarke, V.: Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qual. Res. Psychol.* 3(2), 77–101 (2006). <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qpo630a>
- Flick, U. (2012). *Projektowanie badania jakościowego*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Heszen-Celińska, I., Sęk, H. (2020). *Psychologia zdrowia*, PWN.
- Heszen, I., Sęk H. (2010). Zdrowie i stres. In J. Strelau, D. Doliński (Red.), *Psychologia akademicka. Podręcznik*. t. 2, 682-733. GWP.
- Łuszczynska, A. (2004). *Zmiana zachowań zdrowotnych. Dlaczego dobre chęci nie wystarczają*. GWP.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Ogińska-Bulik, N. (2017). Czynniki warunkujące zdrowie. In B. Woynarowska (Red.). *Edukacja zdrowotna*. 43-83. PWN.
- Pilch, T., Bauman, T. (2010). *Zasady badań pedagogicznych. Strategie ilościowe i jakościowe*. Żak.
- Sęk, H. (Red.). (1998). *Spółeczna psychologia kliniczna*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Stemplewska-Żakowicz, K. (2010). Jak zrobić dobry wywiad (recepta metodologiczna). In. K. Stemplewska-Żakowicz (Red.). *Wywiad psychologiczny 1. Wywiad jako postępowanie badawcze*. 90-116. Pracownia Testów Psychologicznych PTP.
- Zadworna-Cieślak, M. (2010). Zachowania zdrowotne rodziców i ich dorastających dzieci. In N. Ogińska-Bulik (Red.). *Zachowania ryzykowne i szkodliwe dla zdrowia*. 59-76. Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Humanistyczno-Ekonomicznej.
- Ziarko, M. (2006). *Zachowania zdrowotne młodych dorosłych – uwarunkowania psychologiczne*, Bogucki Wydawnictwo Naukowe.

**RODZICIELSTWO W ZDROWIU I W CHOROBIĘ. JAKOŚCIOWE BADANIE  
CODZIENNYCH NAWYKÓW W POLSKICH RODZINACH W CZASIE PANDEMII  
COVID-19**

**ABSTRAKT:** Artykuł przedstawia wyniki badań jakościowych w nurcie interpretatywnym przeprowadzonych w czasie pandemii COVID-19 wiosną 2021 roku na grupie 10 rodziców dzieci na etapie edukacji wczesnoszkolnej oraz nastolatków kończących szkołę podstawową. Badanie miało na celu sprawdzenie jak wyglądało codzienne funkcjonowanie rodzin podczas pierwszej fali Covid-19 w Polsce (marzec-czerwiec 2020). W badaniach zastosowano wywiad częściowo ustrukturyzowany. W przedstawionym fragmencie badań opracowano wyniki odnoszące się do trzech głównych kategorii: nawyki żywieniowe i higieniczne, zdrowie psychiczne rodziców (emocje i stres) oraz relacje rodzic-dziecko i dziecko-rówieśnicy. Najważniejsze zagadnienia, na które należy zwrócić uwagę to zjawisko wspólnego bycia i wspólnego czasu, czego większości badanych rodzicom brakowało w okresie przed pandemicznym.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** rodzicielstwo, zdrowie psychiczne, pandemia COVID-19, nawyki zdrowotne, relacje